

HUMAN SERVICES DIVISION

CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES PROGRAM

CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES - INVESTIGATIONS

N.C. law requires that local county departments of social services ensure children's safety in their homes. A child protective services investigative assessment determines whether abuse or neglect has occurred and whether other services may be needed to help the family.

Q. How did my family get reported?

A. Any person in North Carolina who suspects that a child is abused, neglected or dependent can report this to the county DSS. By law, the identity of the reporter is confidential.

Q. Why does DSS want to talk with me and my family?

A. DSS is required by law to conduct an investigative assessment when there is an allegation that a child is abused, neglected or dependent. This means that a Social Worker needs to meet with you and your family to determine if the allegations are true and if your child is safe.

Q. What happens after a report is made?

A. An investigative assessment must be prompt and thorough to determine if protective services should be provided or the complaint filed as a petition in Juvenile Court. If the allegations include abuse, severe neglect, or violations of law, written notification must be made to the District Attorney and law enforcement to coordinate the investigative process.

Montgomery County DSS' goal is to partner with the family and complete investigations as quickly as possible without Court intervention unless your child cannot be protected. It is important to us that all different types of families are respected and that there is a broad range of lifestyles and parenting practices that provide safety and minimally sufficient care for children in our community.

Q. What is involved with an investigation?

A. The investigation and evaluation shall include a visit to the place where the juvenile resides. An investigation means that a Social Worker looks at the environmental, medical, physical, mental health, educational and emotional needs that keep children safe. Other people with helpful information may be contacted for their input. Family input, resources and safety planning are very important in keeping children safe. Your cooperation and consent for the Social Worker to come into your home for the investigation helps this process. It is our goal to keep children safe and families together whenever possible.

Q. Can I refuse to let the social worker into my home?

A. You must give permission for a Social Worker to enter your home. Social Workers will show their identification and clearly explain why they wish to speak with you. They will tell you about the allegations and the process of an investigation.

For safety reasons, law enforcement officers occasionally escort Social Workers after hours and on weekends. Should you choose not to cooperate with an investigation, DSS may file an obstruction petition so that we may complete the investigation as required by law. If an obstruction petition is filed, a Court hearing will be scheduled no less than five days after the parent or caretaker is served with the petition and summons.

Our goal is to respect your rights and work with you to make sure your child is safe. DSS must comply with the law to ensure that children in our community are safe and provided with minimally sufficient care. We will work with you to assess family strengths, needs and supportive resources that are part of safety planning.

Q. What is the purpose of the Safety Assessment?

A. The Safety Assessment is completed when the social worker first makes contact with the family or whenever there is a change in the family situation. This form outlines safety issues and a plan to keep children safe during the investigation. Often there are no safety factors that make it necessary to develop a safety response. If needed, the Social Worker will discuss with you any safety factors present and ask for your input in making a plan that is specific and detailed.

There may be family members or other supportive people who can help be part of safety planning for your child. You have the opportunity to include your comments and your participation is important in developing this plan.

We believe that most families are capable of finding solutions that can preserve their family while making child safety a priority. It is our job to work with families and their supports to achieve these solutions.

Q. What does it mean to place my children with a relative or other caregiver?

A. When the risk to your child is high and other means to protect are not reasonable, DSS will attempt to work with parents and may ask you to place your child with a family relative to avoid custody. For this reason, DSS always asks about relatives or friends who could provide care for your child. State policy requires that a kinship assessment be completed in these cases, as well as a criminal background and child abuse/neglect check.

These placements can help avoid custody and give the parents an opportunity to address any safety issues needed to return the child home. These placements are intended to be short-term and can occur during the investigative process or while DSS is providing services after an investigation.

Q. What happens after the investigation?

A. If abuse, neglect or dependency allegations are found to be true, then the agency provides services to the family with child safety as the goal. You will be notified in writing of the case decision once the investigation is completed. This should occur within 30 days unless the social worker is unable to gather the needed information in that time frame.

A case decision of substantiation or in need of services means that there are safety and risk factors that could result in children being removed from the home without services to protect the child. There are some cases where risk to children is high and no safety planning or services can reasonably protect them. In these cases, DSS can file a petition with Juvenile Court alleging abuse, neglect or dependency or ask the Court to protect the child by removal from the home.

Bringing a child into foster care is used only as a last resort to protect children from serious harm. Reasonable efforts to keep children safely at home are first attempted, along with relative or kin placement if needed. We believe that children have the right to safety, basic care and to remain with their families whenever possible. Statewide less than 8% of all children who have been substantiated as abused, neglected or dependent are removed from the home.

Hours of Operation:

Monday through Friday
8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Contact Information:

(To make a Child Protective Services Report)

Child Protective Services Intake

(910) 576-6531 during business hours
911 Evenings, Weekends or Holidays

Why, When, Where and How should child maltreatment be reported?

Reporting suspected child abuse or neglect is the first step in protecting children from future harm. By reporting, the caller is helping the family get services and help that is needed. Abused children may carry the trauma associated with the abuse throughout their lives unless treatment, assistance, and support are provided. Because child abuse rarely stops without intervention, it is important that every citizen report suspected cases.

As stated, North Carolina law establishes protective services for children from birth to age eighteen who are suspected to be maltreated by a parent or caretaker. The law requires that any person who suspects a minor child is abused or neglected shall report the case to the local department of social services in the county where the child resides or is found. Reports may be made orally, in writing, or in person. The person who makes the report is immune from criminal or legal liability if the report is made in good faith. The person reporting is encouraged to provide his/her name, address and phone number, which is treated as confidential information, but anonymous calls are accepted. Providing contact information enables DSS to inform the reporter about the status of the report.

The Montgomery County Child Protection Unit can be reached by phone at (910) 576-6531 during regular business hours or 911 twenty-four (24) hours a day, seven days a week. A reporter does not have to prove that abuse/neglect has taken place, but needs to have reasonable grounds for suspicion. The reporter does not need permission from caregivers to make a report, nor do they have to be informed that a report is made. A social worker will listen to the concerns and document all information given.

Information needed to make a report:

- Name, address and age of the child(ren)
- Name and address of the child's parent, guardian, or caretaker
- The child's condition, including the history, nature, and extent of the injury or maltreatment
- Information known about the family's lifestyle which could affect the safety of the child, and perhaps compromise a social worker's safety

What are signs of Child Abuse and Neglect?

Physical and Behavioral Indicators of Physical Abuse:

- Unexplained bruises in various stages of healing
- Bruises in areas not normally subjected to bruising, such as on the face, non-bony areas of the arms, legs, and/or torso
- Welts, human bites, bald spots
- Unexplained burns, especially cigarette burns or scald burns
- Unexplained fractures, injuries or abrasions
- Child is nervous, hyperactive, aggressive, and exhibits disruptive and destructive behaviors
- Child is unusually wary of physical contact
- Child is unduly frightened of parent or caretaker
- Child expresses little or no emotion when hurt
- Child is unusually shy, withdrawn, or passive
- Child's clothing consistently inappropriate for weather

Physical and Behavioral Indicators of Sexual Abuse:

- Irritation around the genitals or rectum, or an abnormal discharge
- Unexplained, recurring urinary tract infections or yeast infections
- Increased, obsessive masturbation
- Enuresis and encopresis (wetting and soiling)
- Play activities which have sexual activity that is not appropriate for the child's age
- Engages in on-going sexual activity that is not appropriate for the child's age
- Child has detailed and sophisticated understanding of sexual behaviors
- Presence of venereal disease
- Child exhibits delinquent or aggressive behavior or excessive temper tantrums
- Child shows signs of depression
- Compulsive stealing, lying, and destructive behaviors
- Child displays self-injurious behaviors like substance abuse, self mutilation, attempts suicide, prostitution and running away

Physical and Behavioral Indicators of Child Neglect:

- Abandonment by parent or caregiver
- Unattended medical needs
- Consistent lack of or inadequate supervision
- Consistent hunger, inappropriate dress, poor hygiene
- Exposure to injurious environment such as domestic violence, alcohol or drug abuse, mental illness
- Child has poor social skills
- Child appears pale, listless
- Child begs or steals food
- Frequent school absences
- Child regularly displays fatigue
- Child exhibits self destructive behavior
- Child has injuries or fears stemming from home environment
- Child frequently displays extreme attention-seeking behavior

Q. What Happens after a Child Protective Services Report is made?

A. Screening of the report: A social worker and supervisor must determine if the allegations contained in the report meet the legal definition of abuse, neglect, or dependency. The Department has jurisdiction only when the maltreatment falls within legal definitions AND was committed or allowed by the parent or caretaker. If the allegations and alleged perpetrator meet these criteria, an investigation is initiated. If a report is not accepted for investigation, the reporter has a right to challenge the Department's decision not to investigate through an agency review process.

Investigation of the report:

A social worker initiates an investigation within 24 hours when abuse is alleged. Investigations involving allegations of neglect posing no imminent risk to the child will be initiated within 72 hours.

In conducting the investigation, the social worker will complete numerous investigative tasks. Tasks include, but are not limited to, the following:

- All children within the household will be seen within 24 or 72 hours depending upon the type of maltreatment alleged and described above
- Parents / caretakers will be seen on the same day as the children
- The alleged perpetrator will be interviewed
- All other persons who reside in the household will be interviewed
- A home visit will take place to determine if the environment poses any safety threat to the child
- Develop a Protection Plan, in writing, with the family to assure immediate protection
- Collateral contacts will be made with any and all persons who may have information about the family (ex. physicians, social workers, psychologist, teachers, guidance counselors, law enforcement personnel, neighbors, extended family members, etc)
- Contact law enforcement to initiate a criminal investigation in cases where severe physical abuse or sexual abuse has occurred.
- Complete a Risk Assessment to assess the likelihood of future risk of maltreatment
- Assess family dynamics and patterns of interaction
- Determine the need for on-going intervention services aimed at maintaining a safe permanent home, OR, make temporary alternate plans for the child's care with a relative or other substitute care such as a foster home when no appropriate relative can be located.
- Notify the reporter of agency finding, whether the agency is filing a petition for court intervention, and procedure for a review by the District Attorney

Document all activities and contacts made during the investigation

The target date for completion of an investigation is 30 days from the receipt of the report.

Contributory Factors to Neglect and Abuse:

While maltreating parents/caretakers share many characteristics with members of the general population, there are patterns of behaviors and family dynamics which are predictors and indicators of child abuse and neglect. The following is a list of characteristics, which are commonly present in maltreating families:

- Tend to be socially isolated and have no social support system
- Parents have low self-esteem
- Parents have distorted ideas regarding the child
- Have little knowledge about child development
- Have unrealistic expectations of the child
- Lack means of controlling child's behavior through alternative methods to corporal discipline
- Inability to empathize (view the world from the point of the child)
- Have difficulty in building trusting relationships
- Mental Health Issues
- Tend to be immature and dependent
- Use of alcohol and/or substances
- Domestic violence
- Inadequate family income and/or sporadic employment history
- Inadequate housing
- Unstable living conditions (transient or frequent moves)
- Limited intellectual functioning
- Family history of child neglect or abuse
- Poor household management
- Poor understanding of role of parent
- Poor communication within the family
- Non-responsive to emotional needs of the child

Child who is developmentally delayed and/or has behavior problems

For more information, contact:

Alice Lammonds, CPS Investigations Unit Supervisor

Email: alice.lammonds@ncmail.net